Cold Weather Alert service in action

31 January 2012 - This week's cold weather has seen the Met Office issue its first England-wide Level 3 Cold Weather Alert of the winter.

The alert was issued because of the expected frosty nights and low daytime temperatures. We have already seen temperatures as low as -6.2°C in Pershore, Worcestershire, -6.1°C in South Farnborough, Hampshire and -5.7°C in Hurn, Dorset this week and the Level 3 Alert is expected to remain in force until the weekend.

The Met Office Cold Weather Alert service supports the Cold Weather Plan developed by the Department of Health, the Health Protection Agency and Age UK to help reduce the impact of cold weather on people's health in winter.

Michelle Mitchell, Charity Director at Age UK said: "It may have been relatively mild so far this year but the winter can be a dangerous time for older people. Many people believe that the only risk of winter weather is getting a cold, but the risk is much greater. Low temperatures raise blood pressure which puts people at a greater risk of heart attacks and strokes, as well as increasing the likelihood and severity of flu and other respiratory problems.

"We want older people to be able to enjoy the winter and, most importantly of all, stay well. That is why we have linked up with the Met Office to get advance information to ensure that forewarned is forearmed when it comes to winter weather."

The Cold Weather Plan sets out actions at each of four alert levels. Alerts are available on our website and are sent to the NHS in England, local authorities, social care organisations and Age UK.

On receipt of the Cold Weather Alert, Age UK share the information with more than 200 local Age UK partners via email and text, as well as through their website.

Age UK Cheshire uses the Cold Weather Alerts to target their 'Snow Angels' service, run in partnership with Cheshire Community Development Trust, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, Wulvern Housing Association and a number of other local community groups.

Snow Angel volunteers provide practical assistance to the older and vulnerable people when the weather is extremely cold, such as help with shopping, path clearing and the delivery of meals.

Age UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire use the Cold Weather Alerts to work with local health teams to ensure the most vulnerable are aware of what to do and have everything they need to stay warm and well.

Patrick Sachon, Health Business Manager at the Met Office, said: "With the first real cold snap of the winter, Age UK demonstrates just how valuable the Cold Weather Alert Service is to the more vulnerable sectors of the community. These alerts put everyone in a better position to respond to forecasts of severe weather, inform those who are most at risk from winter weather and what they can do to keep well.

"With the cold weather staying with us for the rest of the week and temperatures likely to fall to -10°C in some rural areas by Friday morning, its important people keep up to date with Met Office weather forecasts and warnings."

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